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ABSTRACT

This booklet offers teachers of mainstreamed educationally disadvantaged and learning disabled students some practical strategies for tailoring general writing assignments to meet individual needs. The concept of mainstreaming is discussed in part one, and general strategies for composition teachers are listed in part two. Part three describes 13 specific writing assignments that feature extensive prewriting activities for the elementary/middle grades, ordered from easy to difficult, and a nine-week expository writing course for high school students. The last section suggests using writing to improve students' coping skills and presents three case studies to support that use. (AEA)

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A GUIDE TO TAILORING WRITING ASSIGNMENTS FOR THE MAINSTREAMED STUDENT

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WISCONSIN WRITING PROJECT 1980

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Dedication

To the staff and participants of the Wisconsin Writing Project, for providing this opportunity to share, explore, and create.

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--To establish a secure relationship,
a bond of trust, must be the
writing teacher's first concern.

-Jeannine Dobbs

Introduction

During the summer of 1980, a group of four educators - one "special" and three "regular" - were assigned to write a guidebook which would offer teachers of mainstreamed ED and LD students some practical strategies for tailoring general writing assignments to meet individual needs. As we worked toward a coherent formulation of our goals, it became evident that we could not plunge into the area of writing for the mainstreamed student without giving some consideration to the concept of mainstreaming itself. The following discussion is our attempt to clarify our confusion. We share it with you in the hope that you will recognize and respond to it as a reasonably representative expression of the thoughts and feelings of many teachers concerned with mainstreaming today.

Tapescript-An Overview

--I'd like to begin by sharing a definition for mainstreaming which I developed in response to one that I read in April's English Journal. The author, Julie Dodd, began her article "Mainstreaming" by defining mainstreaming as "the placement of handicapped children in the least restrictive environment." And I said, whoa, that is just not true at all. Because the least restrictive environment for one child could be a hospital. For another, it could be a self-contained special ed. room. So I came up with this definition:

> Mainstreaming refers to the placement of students who have both regular and exceptional education needs in the regular classroom - i.e., the mainstream - with or without special modifications of environment, learning activities, or evaluative procedures.

Does that sound good? And from the same article I copied out what I thought were some pertinent observations on why mainstreaming has been resisted by teachers, or hasn't worked well for various reasons. Should I just go through that?

--Before you get into that, when they say, that is, when they decided on this idea of mainstreaming . . .

--Who's "they"?

--The school districts.

--They really didn't decide. Now it's public law.

--OK. Public law.

--Washington decided.

--What's the number of that law?

--PL 94-142; it became a federal statute in 1975.

--What were the advantages given for mainstreaming at that time?

--That's a good question. The rationale behind it was the same as that which challenged "separate but equal" instruction for Black students in the fifties, namely that "separate but equal" was not really equal because the student in a segregated environment is not given the opportunity to interact with the rest of his peers, is not being exposed to the same set of experiences, and is therefore

not receiving the same quality or kind of instruction. So a group of parents, primarily of learning disabled kids went to Washington, made a lot of noise, and got legislators to listen to and support them, and ultimately mandate that any student with an Exceptional Educational Need (EEN) be placed in the "least restrictive environment" in which he can maximally function. Educationally, that means placing the disabled learner in the setting in which the least number of direct interventions are needed to achieve steady academic and personal growth. Does that make sense? Another way of saying it is that EEN students should be educated, to the fullest extent appropriate, with students who are not handicapped. So to give you some examples, Student A might be mainstreamed for his entire academic program but go to the special ed room for study halls because he has difficulty handling unstructured time. Student B might be able to participate in regular classroom presentations and discussions, but have to go to the special ed room for one-on-one assistance with writing projects, difficult reading assignments, or tests. Student C might have to receive all instruction in one or more subjects from the special ed teacher because her skills or attending behaviors are so poor. So basically, the concept of least restrictive environment is just individualization on a larger scale.

--The teachers in my district were initially quite negative about it. They saw it as making impossible demands. Some thought individualizing meant lowering your standards or level of instruction. Terribly demanding. Many teachers had the impression that it was a cop-out on the part of the special ed teacher, who at that time had fewer students and seemed to have an easy enough job without making us take back the very students who had been tagged for special programing to begin with. We saw it as lightening her load at our expense.

--My exposure to mainstreaming has been quite limited. I see it more going on around me. Last year I had no mainstreamed students whom I worked regularly with. There may have been one or two that were surreptitiously in my room, but if so, they coped so well that I didn't know it. But in the past I have had a couple that I did know about. My impression is, if there is a firm support system and good communication with the special ed. teacher, it can work very well. An awful lot of its success or failure comes down to personnel.

--I've had a few mainstreamed kids,and like you, there were times that I wasn't even aware they were LD or even ED students until much later into the year because they were so well-adjusted to the regular classroom. I have no negative feelings about it at all, as far as my experience goes.

--When I first started to teach, we didn't have special labels or identification procedures for children. We already had kids who would later be called ED or LD in our classrooms, and we just had

to deal with them.

--Our school system started its LD program in 1972, and there were a lot of problems that first year. For one thing, nobody knew how to utilize it. For another, there was a rumor that because of their expertise LD teachers were being paid more, or starting at a higher step, than the regular teachers. And the feeling was, "They're getting more money and they're seeing only three kids a day. What are they supposed to be doing anyway?" There was really a lot of animosity. There had been no staff preparation, so we didn't know how to deal with them or how to work together. But in time the programs became much, much better. We learned how to utilize LD teachers and ED teachers, and to benefit from their expertise. There was still some resistance. Teachers who were used to going into their rooms, shutting the doors, and not opening them again until 3 o'clock had the greatest problems adjusting. But I think that once we learned to utilize the knowledge of the resource teachers - we called them that to avoid labels - then mainstreaming became fairly successful.

--Now is there a good deal of integration of EEN kids into the regular curriculum?

--I think so. I worked for three years with sixth and seventh graders who had real problems in math. There were many ED and LD kids in that class each year. One resource teacher worked right in that class with me and it was a very pleasant experience. Together we were able to develop a lot of good strategies. Because I had three or four mainstreamed students in my homeroom, she also taught me how to modify curriculum in the Language Arts area. It was during these years - and I had already taught for several years prior - that I first became aware of the need to modify curriculum for anyone. Before that I would give what I thought was a middle-of-the-road assignment, and some kids would do well and others wouldn't. When I first began to practice modifying curriculum, it was because of those LD teachers. I even modified directions, and now I'm a great one for giving both oral and written directions, writing them on the board step by step. I did that last year when I had no exceptional students because, not only had it become a habit, but I found that it got better results from <u>all</u> the students.

--Would you say that your school system is now working well with mainstreaming?

--Speaking from my own experience, yes. I think the regular teachers are now fairly proficient at utilizing the expertise of the resource teachers. But it was a long time coming. Now we also realize the additional responsibilities that EEN teachers have, such as developing an I. E. P. (Individualized Educational Plan) for each student and holding conferences with every one of those parents at least two or three times during the year. And very often that has to be done outside of the normal school day.

But it was a long time before regular teachers were aware of all the things that special teachers have to do.

--The biggest problem I have with mainstreaming is working with two types of regular teachers. There's the one who doesn't want to acknowledge that he doesn't have total responsibility for the student, and the other who doesn't want to admit that she has any responsibility for the student. Between those extremes are a number of very cooperative teachers who are eager to help students fulfill their potentials. As for the extremists, a large portion of the blame for their lack of cooperation rests with me. It's easy for me to be intimidated by people who give a very strong impression of wanting to do things their own way; and sometimes the very teachers who want or need suggestions the most feel foolish asking for them. Or they'll ask the principal or the school psychologist instead of me. So I see myself as needing to work at becoming both more approachable and more assertive at the same time. I need to win their trust, and I also need to become less fearful of insisting that teachers follow through on some strategies which will facilitate a particular student's learning or development.

--How many disciplines do you work with? You talk with the science teacher, the language arts teacher, all subject teachers. But do you also have to work with the phy. ed. teacher?

--Absolutely. And the industrial arts teacher, art, music, home ec.-- everything. So it's very important that I come across as someone they can trust with their concerns. Right now I have to admit that has been and still is a problem. But I'm working on it.

--I think we just wrote our own paper on the mainstreaming experience. Does Dodd have any more to say about it than we did?

--Not at all. But it took her only about 150 well-chosen words to say what we said in -- never mind; I'm not going to count! Here's Dodd's summary of teachers' reactions to mainstreaming:

> In general, mainstreaming has not been eagerly accepted by most teachers. Many teachers see having mainstreamed students in their classes as an unnecessary burden added to their already loaded teaching schedule. Others question their ability to teach "special" students (Pugac,1979).
>
> A crucial weakness in the implementation of mainstreaming has been the inadequate preparation of regular teachers to work with mainstreamed students. (Morsink,1979). Although most college and university teacher preparation programs for regular classroom teachers now include courses in mainstreaming, most practicing teachers have had little or no training in how to work with handicapped students. [Another problem is] that most mainstreaming training programs have been developed from the perspective of special education teachers with emphasis on individualized needs of students and diagnostic-

remedial techniques, which differs from the perspective of the regular teachers who are more geared to subject matter and whole classroom management systems. The effects of such training [have frequently been] "confusion, resistance and... unsuccessful results" (Nahmias and Allnutt,1977).[1]

--That sounds like a synopsis of all the things we've said so far.

--Yes, but it's nice to be able to show that our observations are supported by existing literature. That gives us some additional credibility and authority.

--So where do we go from there?

--I think it's time to move into the area of writing itself. Dodd identified one teacher need as better preparation for dealing with mainstreamed students. We are going to try to provide some of that preparation in the form of writing strategies for the ED/LD student. I thought we could begin by listing several strategies that can be generally applied by any teacher in any content area, and then give examples of typical writing assignments and show how each one could be specifically adapted or modified.

--Might we also list - or would they be conspicuous by their absence - those things that are <u>least</u> effective? Like the do's <u>and</u> don'ts. There would be no sense in mentioning those don'ts, would there? Things <u>not</u> to do?

--Maybe that could be solved by . . .

--It's better to think positively.

--Right. It would probably sound preachy anyway.

--Yeah, and it might step on toes.

--OK, so we're talking about the do's.

--Can you give us an example?

--Sure. "Reduce length." If your class is supposed to write a two-page character sketch, for example, the student with writing difficulties could be asked to do just one page, or even two paragraphs.

--How do you explain that to the kid who says. "Hey, I'm really struggling to get these two pages written, and Johnny is already finished because he only had to write two paragraphs?"

Dodd, Julie. "Mainstreaming". <u>English Journal</u>, April 1980.

--A legitimate and often-asked question. First, it's probably going to take Johnny as much time and effort to do a good job on his two paragraphs as it would take a student of average ability to write two pages. Second, you have the option of making this modification for any low-ability student, not just the ones who are specially programed. Third, you could give all the students an option with respect to length by specifically defining the boundaries as "no shorter than two well-constructed paragraphs and no longer than two pages." Fourth, you could give the whole class, or just the complainers, an edifying lecture on the concept of human variance, emphasizing that just as you don't throw a poor swimmer into the deep end of the pool before he's mastered some strokes, so you don't ask more of any student than he or she is capable of performing at any given time. Don't forget to point out that a person who doesn't yet write very well is no more inferior to anyone else than someone who doesn't know how to ski or dive or play the piano.

--That's not bad. You know, Jeannine Dobbs makes a very relevant point in her article "Teaching Writing to Emotionally Disturbed Children." She says, "Give more support to students during the process of writing, and less attention to the product." That advice is applicable to all students.

--Exactly. The process is important.

--It's more than important - it's crucial!

--Besides, most kids aren't as critical of differential treatment as teachers think they're going to be.

--That's true. My son has just finished first grade, and he talks about how there are certain kids - he doesn't use the word mainstreamed, but "specials" - who were in his class in Kindergarten and first grade. So he is already aware of the reality of mainstreaming.

--How does he react to it? Does he consider the presence of the "specials" to be a nuisance?

--No. He did some. . .well, he didn't tease or anything like that, but he did have a couple of negative terms that he used to refer to the special kids. Or he'd come home and say, "You know, Jason can hardly talk." When he was in Kindergarten particularly he'd comment on this. And we'd ask him, "Do you know how come?" And he'd say, "I don't know. He just can't talk. But teacher says we're supposed to talk to him anyway. He's supposed to watch us move our mouths." So obviously the teacher had done something in terms of preparing the kids. Then we as parents only had to reinforce the idea that Jason had special needs, and my son should simply try to realize and accept that. And he has. And he's not a particularly unusual kid; he doesn't have any extraordinary perceptions or deep insights about anything. He's just a kid.

--I've also been impressed with the way kids can tolerate individual differences. I'm going to have four special ed kids in my fifth grade class next year - ED and LD and one child who's a combination and has many, many problems. I observed him in his fourth grade class this spring to see how that teacher dealt with him. She gave a lot of her time to him, and the other kids seemed to take it in stride. I was really impressed with student reaction. There are certain kids who have formed a support group for this particular child; they help him, guide him, and encourage him. And those kids are coming along to my class with him. They're like a team. I feel like I'm getting a complete infield! I think it's great. And not only that, this kid has many unusual classroom behaviors. When I went to observe him I was also interested in the reactions of the other kids. He'd do his number, and I'd look around, and the other students would just be sitting there nonchalantly, because they had gone to school with this child since Kindergarten. They were very used to him. In fact, some of the kids even pointed out this child's improvement over the years. They acted really proud of the fact that this boy had made so much improvement, and that they had been a part of it. That's real acceptance!

--I agree with you. I see a lot of hope for mainstreaming. I think kids are accepting it, and I don't see - maybe it goes on in the cafeteria or in the halls - but I don't see a lot of harrassing or teasing of mainstreamed kids.

--Well, I almost started crying while you were speaking, because what I see going on, what goes on in my school a lot, is that the EEN kids are often scapegoated by teachers who, whether they mean to or not, have ways of encouraging ridicule. And I get so upset about it because it's so frustrating, and it just undoes everything we've been talking about, when the very behaviors you're trying to train kids to ignore are the ones some teacher chooses to publicly rebuke or ridicule. I don't want to end this discussion on a sorrowful note, but that is a real sore point with me.

--And it's a valid one, too. But if you look at it from the teachers' point of view, maybe they're frustrated,too,from not knowing how else to cope, and so what they need is to be given a wider range of alternatives than they're presently aware of.

--Yes, and lots and lots of support from the specialist while they're trying them out, and lots of praise even when - especially when - things don't seem to be working.

--What you're saying is, we should pay more attention to the process and less to the product, just like we said to do with kids.

--Why not? Teachers are people too.

--Right. So let's go home and write the next chaper. See you tomorrow with your assignments.

General Strategies for Writing Instructors

1. Use small groups. Small group work could be centered around students' writing needs. For instance, one group could work on improving their papers' punctuation, while another group might be working on the use of footnotes. Each group would consist of several students who have weaknesses in these areas and a couple of students who are strong in these areas. As the particular areas of concern change, so would the composition of the groups. (Dodd, 1980)
2. Work in pairs. Using the "buddy" system, students read one another's papers aloud, proof each other's papers, and ask each other to explain any unclear passages.
3. Use peer tutors. This is similar to the strong students working with the weaker ones in small groups, here the assistance is delivered on a one-to-one basis.
4. Reduce written assignments. Taking into consideration the needs and abilities of each student, you can vary the length of written assignments. For instance, if the class is assigned to write a 2 page character analysis, you might have the low ability student write one page, or even 2 paragraphs. For students with severe deficits, writing 2 paragraphs correctly will require approximately the same effort that it will take the rest of the class to write 2 pages. (Dodd, 1980)
5. Give options with respect to length. By giving the entire class

a range of, say, 2 paragraphs to 2 pages, the exceptional or lower ability student is not singled out. Surprisingly enough, most good writers will choose the lengthier option, and even identified underachievers may be motivated to write more than the minimum amount when not required to do so.

6. Establish individual performance criteria. In general, the entire class should be aware of your goals and expectations for each assignment. For the mainstreamed and low-ability student, these criteria could be reduced or modified to conform to the capability of the individual learner.

7. Allow ample in-class time for all phases of the writing process. Be available to provide assistance and feedback at each stage of composition (pre-writing, composing, editing).

8. Allow extra time for assignment completion. In one learning paradigm, the key element in learning is time (Carroll, 1963). Some students will require more time to complete assignments. Rather than be penalized for this, they should be encouraged to edit and revise until their individual performance standards are achieved.

9. Use positive reinforcement. Emphasize what is good about the mainstreamed student's writing. EEN students are easily deterred from making another attempt at writing if their initial efforts evoke more criticism than praise.

10. Modify your grading practices. For example, do not grade every assignment; grade only the finished product. Give separate grades for content (ideas) and mechanics (spelling usage).

11. Break long-term projects down into discrete assignments. Have

an established due date for each segment.

12. Be specific. As a general rule of thumb, you cannot be too specific. You will find that most children, even those of low ability, will be able to fulfill a task when they are given complete instructions on how to perform it.

Specific Lessons and Modification Strategies

Rationale

In the following pages, we attempt to provide a working model for task-analyzing a writing assignment into its smallest sequential steps. We offer this model as the most viable and economical way to provide for individual differences and ensure maximum success for each student. Before introducing the model, we would like to explain how we came to develop it, and why we believe so strongly in its value to the writing teacher and to the students.

A Format is Tentatively Proposed.

Our original plan for this chapter was that the three teachers representing the elementary/middle and secondary grades would submit examples of assignments actually used in class. The EEN teacher would then propose the specific modifications. That would bring each assignment in line with the abilities of lower-achieving ED and LD students. As individuals, the three classrooom teachers wrote up a sampling of their assignments; as a team, we came together to discuss them and see what modifications we would suggest.

The Need for Clarity Emerges.

The first assignment was read aloud: "Write a 5 - paragraph character sketch of some minor character in Johnny Tremain." The follow-up question, "How would you modify that?" elicited the

response, "Modify what?" It soon became evident that expectations could not be modified unless they were explicitly stated. What exactly were the requirements for this assignment? Why 5 paragraphs? Was each paragraph to deal with some specific content, and if so, what should that content be? What criteria would the teacher use for evaluating the completed assignment? As the teacher who had submitted the assignment answered each of these questions, we began to see how the assignment could be written to make explicit the expectations which were hitherto known only to the teacher.

The Role of Prewriting is Clarified.

With our revised and refined assignment in hand, we felt better prepared to deal with modifications. The discussion now proceeded along these lines -

Reg. Teacher: We could have the mainstreamed student do...

EEN Teacher: You wouldn't need to make that modification if, before the class begins writing, you...

Reg. Teacher: Well, how about if we have the mainstreamed student...

EEN Teacher: That could be avoided if, prior to writing, the whole class would...

As we developed a repertoire of activities that could be engaged in by the entire class before composing, it became obvious that when all students were thoroughly prepared, fewer modifications were needed.

A Task - Analysis Model is Developed.

The very essence of successful task analysis can be expressed in two words: Assume nothing. The content and sequential ordering

of our pre-writing activities was determined by the answer to the question "What does the student need to know in order to do that?" As we answered this question over and over for each assignment, each activity, we were appalled at the number of things we had taken for granted in terms of what we expected our students to know or be able to do. We became aware that at some point in a child's life, adults begin to make too many assumptions about the child's state of readiness or preparedness for a given task. It seems that only the very young and the developmentally disabled are given our tacit permission to be ignorant of the correct way to execute a task which we adults expect all older children of average intelligence to be able to perform. In fact, task analysis is generally a required course only for future teachers of the developmentally disabled, and very few other educators learn to use it as a practical model. Although the writing process has been broken down into the three basic components of prewriting, composing, and editing, we believe we may be the first to apply task analysis so directly and deliberately toward the formulation and sequencing of prewriting strategies.

A Success-Oriented Philosophy Emerges.

The justification and rationale for using a task-analysis model to teach writing is that it enables students to achieve success in their initial composing efforts. Yet because teachers are the product of a society which believes that people learn through their mistakes, we often set our students up for initial failure. In the process of developing our model lessons, we found that we, too, were guilty of that practice. For example, one teacher submitted

an assignment directing students to write a paragraph instructing someone how to make a peanut butter-and-jelly sandwich. Another suggested that as a prewriting activity, students list in order all the steps they would need to execute in making the sandwich. This prewriting activity was initially objected to by the teacher who contributed the assignment, on the grounds that getting the students to think about the steps they would have to perform would enable them to write clearer, more accurately descriptive paragraphs. "Well, why shouldn't they?" one teacher asked. "Because then it wouldn't be funny," the contributor replied. "Why -- you want to trick them!" the first teacher exclaimed. The contributor admitted that this was indeed the case, but that the lesson had been meant to illustrate "trial by failure," and students thought it was fun. The point is that, with the best of intentions most teachers assume that "tricking" students into exposing their ignorance will get them to pay more attention to the errors that are afterwards pointed out to them. Our committee, however, now feels that this failure-oriented approach to teaching contradicts established principles of learning. The preponderance of research in the areas of operant conditioning and behavior management indicates that for the majority of subjects, reward is a far greater inducement to learning than punishment. And what is more rewarding than success? "Practice Makes Perfect".

When teachers adhere to success-oriented philosophy, they assume the obligation to plan carefully in order to maximize student potential for success. An examination of our model lessons will reveal that in carrying out all of the prewriting activities, the

student has done everything but write the composition - and in some cases, has actually done that as well. This "rehearsal for writing" is motivated by the fact that we do ascribe to the concept of learning by doing. One learns to ride a bike by riding a bike. Students learn to write by writing. A "practice composition," or rough draft, gives the teacher a basis for assessing whether his instruction (i.e., student preparation) has been adequate. We can inspect it to determine whether student needs exist, and we can teach to the needs we find by providing additional opportunities for practice. The evaluative feedback we give students on their first drafts would never be in the form of a grade, but should consist of specific constructive suggestions for improvement, which they will then be given the chance to incorporate into their revisions. The paradigm for writing thus becomes:

PREWRITING

(reviewing needed skills, defining an audience and a purpose for writing, selecting and organizing ideas)

COMPOSING

(writing the paper)

EDITING

(checking for clarity, fluency, spelling, and mechanics)

EVALUATING

(identifying specific strengths and weaknesses)

REVISING

(using feedback to improve the composition)

All Are Included.

One of the most exciting discoveries we made while writing this Guide was that the instructional model presented here appears to offer the greatest potential for successfully integrating the EEN student into the mainstream of learning. Instead of sending her into the classroom for the purpose of being educated with non-handicapped peers and then presenting her with a low-level "alternative" assignment on which she must work alone, our model offers the mainstreamed student a chance to participate with the class during each phase of the writing process, to engage in every instructional activity, and to experience success in even first compositions. Previously, our best efforts to integrate a lower-ability child into the regular classroom have frequently failed because in our well-meaning attempts to individualize his instruction, we have inadvertently isolated him and called attention to "differences". Our model, on the other hand, exemplifies the concept of the least restrictive environment. That it therefore benefits the EEN student is obvious; but it does more than that. Task-analysis of writing assignments enables all slow learners and underachievers, not just those in special programs, to experience higher levels of involvement and success. When students are involved and successful, their disruptive acting-out behaviors tend to decrease, benefiting the class as a whole by promoting an atmosphere conducive to writing. As the need for disciplinary intervention diminishes, the teacher can devote more time to providing the student writers with on-the-spot feedback and assistance. When all are included, everybody gains.

More is More.

Refined task analysis is no easy process; it is a tedious and time-consuming procedure. Our initial attempts to rewrite an assignment and develop appropriate prewriting activities for it were frustrating and mentally exhausting. But the more we persevered, the more adept we became at wording writing assignments in such a manner that the preliminary activities began to suggest themselves. A project which we had undertaken in the hope of benefiting other teachers and their students turned out to be of ineffable value to us. In the course of writing the lessons, we ourselves had to undergo each phase of the writing process defined in the paradigm above. This experience has forced us to bring to conscious awareness and re-examine many of our values and assumptions concerning education in general and the teaching of writing in particular. We emerged from the experience with the realization that the more we had put into it, the more we had gotten from it in the form of greater understanding, empathy, and humility.

Exemplary Lessons are Used.

In the following pages we have provided the writing teacher with a number of sample assignments for elementary, middle, and high school students that will serve to illustrate the process described in this rationale. We have included a variety of types of writing (descriptive, narrative, informative, and persuasive) and potential audiences (both real and hypothetical). Each lesson is task-analyzed in the prewriting phase, and several of the lessons include suggestions for composing, editing, evaluating, and revising. Specific modification strategies are provided for those

assignments where the process of task analysis was unable to bring the assignment within the ability range of the least capable student.

It should be noted that modification of a given assignment allows the mainstreamed EEN and the low-achieving student to reach the same objectives as his more capable classmates, inasmuch as the modifications are usually accomplished by varying the individual performance criteria.

Modification is therefore superior and preferable to assignment substitution, because it does not disbar any learner from full participation in all phases of writing instruction, and does not require the teacher to develop one or more alternative non-related lesson plans.

Assignment for the Elementary/Middle Grades

The lists of Prewriting Activities for the lessons that follow should not be considered exhaustive. Even as this booklet was going to press, we were still thinking up other activities that could or should have been included. Moreover, teachers should feel free to try out any of the assignments without feeling obligated to present the lesson in the manner described. These are only exemplary lessons, included primarily to illustrate process, not to dictate content. Assignments for the elementary/middle grades are loosely ordered from the easier to the more difficult. Each one is independent of the others, and as a whole they do not constitute a systematic writing program.

1. WRITING A SET OF INSTRUCTIONS

Type of writing: Descriptive

Audience: Peers

Assignment:

Write a paragraph on how to make a peanut butter-and-jelly sandwich. Imagine that you are giving directions to someone who has never before made a sandwich of any kind. Be as specific as possible. Don't assume anything.

Prewriting:

a. Examine samples of clearly written directions. These could be from cookbooks, models, textbooks, automobile or appliance manuals, etc.

b. Present a list of scrambled instructions for simple tasks and have the students practice unscrambling them.

c. A variation of (b). Cut up 4 or 5 sets of "instructions" that contain the same number of steps as 1/4 or 1/5 the number of pupils in your class. Divide the class into 4 or 5 teams and give each team captain one set of instructions to distribute. (Note: each team should know what its "instructions" are for.) Students line up in the order that their directions should be followed.

Each team should signal when finished so the teacher can record who finished first, second, etc. When all teams have arranged themselves, students read their instructions consecutively, beginning with the team that finished first. Students on the other teams decide whether the presenting team is really arranged correctly. The winning team is the first that finished in correct order. (The difficulty of this activity can be increased, if desired, by dividing

the class into 3 teams and distributing lengthier sets of instructions.

d. Present a demonstration of how to make a peanut butter-and-jelly sandwich. Students observe and take notes, then compare.

e. Stage a counter-demonstration of how to make, or ask students for examples of, the most poorly-made "silly sandwich" you or they can imagine. Point out that students could end up with such sandwiches if their directions are unclear, not specific, or out of order.

f. Explain to the class that today you are going to make peanut butter-and-jelly sandwiches. The sandwiches will be made according to <u>their</u> specific directions. Have assembled at the front of the room, or where everyone can see them, all the materials needed for sandwich making: bread, peanut better, jelly, knives, paper plates.

g. Each student then lists, in order, all the steps s/he would execute in making the sandwich.

h. Instruct the students to combine the sentences on their lists into a paragraph, using ordinals and connectors such as "First," "Second," "Then," "Next," "Finally," (these words can be written on the board).

<u>Composing</u>: The students write their paragraphs.

<u>Evaluating</u>:

Make a sandwich for each student according to the directions s/he has given you. Read each step aloud as you execute it. In spite of all the prewriting preparation, you should wind up with quite an odd assortment of edibles (some may even resemble peanut

butter-and-jelly sandwiches!) Students then eat their completed sandwiches, and everyone has a good time.

2. WRITING A SENSORY POEM

Type of Writing: Descriptive

Audience: Peers

Assignment:

Write a 6-line descriptive poem about an edible object. The first 5 lines will describe the object from the standpoint of each of the senses in the following order: sight (how it looks), touch (how it feels), smell, sound (the noise made when you bite into it) and taste. The last line will name the object or include its name in a descriptive phrase or expression of feeling about it.

Prewriting:

a. Give each student an edible object (apple, tangerine, bagel, etc.)

b. As a class, discuss the object's attributes as they appeal to each of the senses - how the object looks, feels, smells, etc. Encourage the class to expand one-word descriptors (e.g., "red") by employing comparisons and vivid modifiers (e.g., How red? Red like WHAT? As red as WHAT?)

c. Write particularly fresh or striking phrases on the board as they are suggested by the students. Working as a class, arrange some of these phrases into a 5-line stanza which will serve as a model. Elicit various descriptive endings (e.g., "Perfect apple" or "Oh, how I love juicy apples!"), and have the class choose one for the last line of the model.

d. Share another model (have dittoed copies available). Note how free verse can dispense with certain conventions such as complete sentences and end punctuation in favor of vivid phrases and fresh,

unexpected images.

e. Tell the students to bring a single edible object (not a composite like a salad or sandwich) of their choice to class the next day. (The teacher, mindful that some students might forget their edible, will have some extras available, as well as a knife to split some for sharing.)

Composing:

Each student writes a sensory poem describing his edible following the model previously written or studied. (Note: Make sure each student has, or can see, the list of senses written in the order suggested here; students should also have copies of the model poem previously written or studied.)

Evaluating:

Each student reads her poem to the class. Classmates share their reactions and evaluate the poem by pointing out any fresh images or striking comparisons they observe.

Variation:

Students choose their edibles and do their composing at home. The next day, each student reads only the first 5 lines of his poem to the class. Classmates take turns guessing the object described.

3. WRITING A FANTASY

Type of Writing: Narrative

Audience: Peers

Assignment:

Imagine you have turned into an animal or an inanimate object. Write a fictious account of a day, or part of a day, in your life.

Prewriting:

a. Discuss the concept of personification. Share models of children's stories which give inanimate objects or animals human characteristics.

b. Review the use of the first person narrative point of view.

c. Review verb tense, pronoun usage, and punctuation used in conversation.

d. Use the following trigger questions as a guide for the students to follow:

1) What is life like for you (the thing or animal you have turned into)?

2) What makes you happy? Sad?

3) What do you wish would happen to you?

4) How are you treated or used by people?

5) What things make your life easy or difficult?

6) What things in your life do you wish you could change?

Composing:

a. Students could be given the option of beginning their composition with the phrase: "When I woke up this morning, I looked in the mirror and found I had turned into a . . ."

b. Each student should write from three to seven paragraphs.

Evaluating:

a. Students work in pairs to make each other's compositions grammatically correct.

b. Students share their finished products with peers.

Comment:

This assignment has been significantly rewritten and calls for greater specificity than originally presented in the classroom. In its present state, it should prove motivating enough for students of all abilities and further modifications would therefore not be necessary.

4. WRITING A JOURNAL

Type of Writing: Narrative

Audience: Self (peers/teacher optional)

Assignment:

Students will keep a daily record of thoughts and experiences in a journal.

Prewriting:

a. Examine and discuss samples of journal writing.

b. Share ideas for the kinds of subjects/topics students could write about. For example, students could describe something that happened during the day, a new or different idea, something that excited or bored them, a friendship, etc.

c. Share ideas for the form the journal entries could take such as a paragraph, a series of questions, various poetic styles, etc.

d. Establish the number of times per week entries should be made, the length of time the journal will be kept, and whether in-class or outside-class time would be required.

e. Emphasize that journal entries are private and sharing is optional.

Comments:

Journal entries encourage children to organize thoughts, think creatively, and write coherently. All children should be able to succeed on some level with the format described, therefore no modifications are necessary.

5. WRITING (OR TRANSCRIBING) AN INTERVIEW

Type of Writing: Informative

Audience: Peers

Assignment:

Interview one of your classmates and then write a paragraph based on the information you discovered, or make a tape recording of the interview and transcribe it.

Prewriting:

a. Discuss the interview process as a way of getting to know someone better in a relatively short amount of time. Suggest that the questions asked by the interviewer focus on a specific aspect of someone's life. For example, the questioning may center around biographical data, the family, a specific interest, the high point of someone's life, etc.

b. Group students according to the focus selected.

c. Help each group generate questions appropriate to their focus. Review the "Five W's." Suggest that questions be formulated in an open-ended manner in order to discourage monosyllabic responses. (Helpful hint: Ask questions that begin with "how" and "why.")

d. Students who wish to tape their interviews are shown how to use the tape recorder.

e. Students interview one another in pairs.

f. After collecting the information, discuss paragraph organization or transcribing procedures:

1) Formulate a good topic sentence identifying the specific focus of the interview. The body of the paragraph should consist of supporting details.

2) Review correct punctuation for quotations and the use of the colon for transcribing.

Composing:

Students write the paragraph or transcribe the tape. Teacher circulates, checking for correct punctuation, verb tense, usage.

Evaluating:

a. Share the paragraph or the transcription with peers.

b. Originally paired partners evaluate one another's interviews according to the following criteria:

1) Was the information gathered relevant to the focus of the interview?

2) Would you have liked the interviewer to have asked further questions?

3) If so, what questions would have made the interview more complete?

Revising:

Students who received evaluative feedback indicating weaknesses in their interviews conduct a second interview, tightening the focus or eliciting further information from the subject. These interviews are then written up or transcribed as directed.

6. WRITING A BUSINESS LETTER

Type of Writing: Persuasive

Audience: (Fictitious) Handy-Dandy Manufacturing Co.

Public Relations Director

Assignment:

Write a letter to the Public Relations Director of the Handy-Dandy Mfg. Co. in which you (1) identify a faulty product; (2) describe how the product defect has inconvenienced or injured you; (3) express how you feel about the inconvenience or injury; (4) demand satisfaction from the company.

Prewriting:

a. Discuss general characteristics of the business letter: heading, inside address, greeting, closing. Write on the board sample greetings and closings - Gentlemen, Dear Sir or Madam, Sincerely, Yours truly. Review such mechanics as the use of the colon, comma, etc. in the parts of the letter.

b. Examine all kinds of business letters and discuss them.

c. Find and share many different letters of complaint. Find or create one that follows the format above and distribute copies to each student as a reference.

d. Distribute the following scenario, and read it aloud:

> You have purchased a Handy-Dandy Garage Door Opener that opens and closes your garage door with the touch of a button from inside your car. The remote-control push-button tuner on your neighbor's TV also happens to open and close your garage door. This has resulted in damage to your car (a smashed hood) and to your person (three fingers sprained while trying to get the garage door off the car hood). The Handy-Dandy has a 5-year guarantee and you bought it three weeks ago for $129.00. Write to the Public Relations Director of the Handy-Dandy Manufacturing Co., 1124 Maple Street, Warren, Ohio 53521. Express your complaint and ask for help in resolving your problem.

Composing:

a. Students write the heading, inside address, and salutation on their rough copies. Circulate around the room to assist with placement and punctuation.

b. Students write the body of their letter, following the model provided which includes all four points discussed in the order given.

c. Students write the closing and sign their letters. Circulate to spot check for correct placement and punctuation.

Evaluating:

a. Students exchange letters.

b. Each student now assumes the role of the Handy-Dandy Company's Public Relations Director.

c. From the viewpoint of the PR Director, each student answers the following questions (handout provided) about the letter he has received:

1) Does the writer clearly identify his product?

2) Does the writer clearly indicate the product's defect(s)?

3) Does the writer provide sufficient evidence that the product itself is at fault?

4) Can the PR Director sympathize with the feelings of the writer?

5) After reading the letter, does the PR Director want to help the writer solve his problem? (If not, why not?)

6) What suggestions can the PR Director give the writer for making his/her letter more persuasive?

d. The letters are returned to their authors, along with the sheets of comments and suggestions.

Revising:

The students make final copies of their letters incorporating the suggestions of the evaluators.

Optional Follow-up Assignment: Answer a letter of complaint.

Prewriting:

a. Using the same scenario given above, students brainstorm (no judgment or evaluating allowed) as many ideas as they can for how the PR Director could solve the consumer's problem. These are listed on the board.

b. Hand each student one of the completed letters, making sure no student gets his own.

c. Tell the students: You are once again the Public Relations Director for the Handy-Dandy Mfg. Co. It is your job to answer letters of complaint. You can't offer the consumer his money back, nor can you replace the defective merchandise. You'd like to help the consumer with her problem. You must be polite so the consumer will continue to buy products from your company. Keeping those things in mind, write a letter to the dissatisfied customer whose letter you have just received.

Composing:

Students write their responses following the business letter format provided. Remind students that the company's address is now the heading, and the consumer's name and address comprise the inside address.

Comments:

a. When assignments at the elementary level are broken down as finely and specifically as these two lessons have illustrated,

further modifications will rarely if ever be needed. The teacher need only reduce expectations, knowing that the less able student's writing will not have the "tone" or "polish" of the more able student's.

b. Evaluation frequently precedes the final editing, thus giving the student a better chance to produce an effective piece of writing.

7. WRITING SENTENCES

Assignment:

Write a statement, a question, an exclamation, and a command in which the following words appear: raccoon, discipline, girth, spigot. You may change the form of the words (e.g., disciplined) if desired.

Prewriting:

a. Review the 4 sentence types - provide models. Examine word order and end punctuation for each type.

b. Have students provide examples of each sentence type following the models provided.

c. List 4 words and elicit sample sentences.

Composing:

Students write the 4 types of sentences from the list of words provided.

Modifications:

a. Omit the exclamation and possibly the command for very low ability students. If you still want them to produce 4 sentences, have them compose 2 statements and 2 questions instead.

b. Supply a list of easier words.

Evaluation:

Sentences are evaluated by the teacher on the basis of internal consistency, correct punctuation, and spelling.

8. WRITING A COMPARISON/CONTRAST

Type of Writing: Descriptive

Audience: Teacher/Peers

Assignment: Write a paragraph comparing two common inanimate objects such as two pencils, pencil cases, or purses.

Prewriting:

a. Have two similar items clearly visible to students.

b. Ask students to compile a list of attributes to be compared such as size, shape, elasticity, combustibility, color, composition.

c. Referring to the attributes just cited, list the ways these two objects are alike.

d. Students examine a model paragraph in which two objects are compared. (Copies of the paragraph are distributed for reference.)

e. Students select 2 common inanimate objects for comparison.

f. Each student lists the ways his/her chosen objects are alike.

Composing: Students rewrite their lists in paragraph form.

Modification:

Students write a paragraph contrasting two inanimate objects. Prewriting activities a and b remain the same; in c - f, substitute the words different and contrast (ed) for alike, compared, and comparison. The less capable student would be expected to see fewer contrasts.

Culminating Activity:

Have students write a 2 paragraph assignment. In the first paragraph two similar inanimate objects will be compared, and in the second paragraph the same two objects will be contrasted. Examine a model composition and discuss how to make smooth connections and

and transitions with single words (first, moreover, nevertheless, but, besides, also) and phrases (in addition, on the other hand, etc.). Less able students will be expected to write shorter paragraphs and make fewer kinds of transitions.

9. "LOST AND FOUND"

Type of Writing: Descriptive/Persuasive

Audience: Peers

Assignment:

You are a lost item lying among other lost items on a "Lost and Found" table in the school hall. Write a letter to your owner describing yourself and asking your owner to come find you; okay to be funny, sad, fanciful, sarcastic, etc.

Prewriting:

a. Examine "Lost and Found" notices in local newspaper. Evaluate the completeness of the descriptions of the lost/found articles (could students identify the missing item from its description?)

b. Practice giving short snappy oral descriptions of objects in the classroom, clothing, etc.

c. Give students a chance to "be" an article of clothing, classroom object, etc. and have them describe themselves orally in the first person.

d. Each student is given a copy of the following list and told to select one item from it:

1 tennis shoe
an American Exchange Bank ballpoint
a paperback novel with a torn cover (student must supply title)
a science textbook
a pair of glasses
a gym sock with a hole in the heel
a valentine signed "Love, Linda"
a house key

e. Students identify with their selected items, and jot down adjectives and phrases they could use to describe themselves.

f. Speaking for the lost item, students answer the following questions (provide dittoed handout):

1) What are you?
2) What do you look like? (check answers to e)
3) To whom do you belong? (may be real or fictitious)
4) How did you get lost?
5) How do you feel now?
6) What will happen to you if you aren't found?
7) How will it effect your owner if you aren't found?

Composing:

Students use their responses to activities (e) and (f) to write letters to their "owners". As students write, the teacher circulates to check for spelling, punctuation, capitalization, etc.

Modifications: The least capable student could write his letter by answering items 1-2, 4-7 in complete sentences.

Editing:

Teacher checks completed rough drafts for mechanical errors and consistency of tone. Students correct errors and write final copies.

Evaluating:

a. Students share their completed letters by reading them aloud to the class.

b. Letters are mounted as a wall display behind/beside the actual school lost-and-found table or box.

Variation:

Have students create similar letters for real items lying on the lost-and-found table (or in the box). The finished letters would be posted on a display mount nearby.

10. WRITING A SUMMARY

Type of Writing: Informative

Audience: Teacher

Assignment: Write a 3 paragraph summary of Johnny Tremain's accident which occurs in Chapter Two of the novel. Include the cause of the accident (paragraph 1), the nature of the injury (paragraph 2), and how/by whom it was treated (paragraph 3).

Prewriting:

a. Read Chapter Two of Johnny Tremain.

b. Provide an article and as a class write a model summary.

c. Discuss passive voice (e.g., "Johnny was injured when...")

Composing:

Write the 3 paragraph summary. Each paragraph should contain at least 3 sentences containing details of the accident.

Evaluation: Teacher checks to see that the important details of the accident have been included.

Modification:

a. Let student listen to a tape recording of Chapter 2 as she reads along.

b. Reduce expectations in terms of the number of details for each paragraph.

c. Student could be provided with trigger questions such as:

1. What happened? How? Why?

2. How did the injury look?

3. Who treated the injury? What did they do for it?

Try to avoid pronoun subjects when answering the questions.

11. WRITING A CHARACTER SKETCH

Type of Writing: Descriptive

Audience: Teacher

Assignment:

Write a 5 paragraph sketch of some minor character in Johnny Tremain. The first paragraph will introduce the character you selected and define three of his character traits. The second paragraph will briefly recount 2 or 3 instances where the first trait was exhibited; the third paragraph will deal similarly with the second trait, and the fourth paragraph will recount 2 or 3 illustrations of the third trait. The fifth paragraph will restate the thesis of the first paragraph using different words.

Prewriting:

a. Discuss character traits generally. What are they? Have the class name as many different traits as they can think of, and write them on the board.

b. Using characters from another recent reading, have the class identify some character traits for each, and then relate some incident where the trait was exhibited. Point out that character traits are not something you can see; they are inferred through studying people's behavior. For each trait identified, ask the trigger question: "What did the character do to give you that impression?"

c. Ask student volunteers to share one character trait with the class, using this frame: "You can tell that I'm (name trait) because I (state action)." Teacher goes first to model.

d. Study a character sketch written according to the

prescribed format.

Composing: Students write a 5 paragraph character sketch for a minor character in Johnny Tremain.

Evaluating:

Working in pairs, students give each other feedback about the appropriateness of the examples chosen to illustrate each of the three traits identified.

Modifications:

a. Give individual assistance as needed in helping the student to select a character, identify his or her obvious traits, and find illustrations of those traits.

b. The least capable student can write a 3 paragraph composition in which the first paragraph introduces the character and defines one obvious trait, the second paragraph provides illustrations (at least two), and the third paragraph restates the first.

12. WRITING CONCLUSIONS

Type of Writing: Narrative

Audience: Peers

Assignment:

Write an ending, from Jerry's point of view, for the story "Bloodstain"(from Focus, Scott-Foresman), telling what will happen to Jerry by the end of the next month or the next year. Will Jerry be able to keep his secret? Begin with the last line of the story, "He would never tell." and write a one or two page conclusion.

Prewriting:

a. Read the story "Bloodstain," in which Jerry, while hunting, accidently shoots the father of his friend Fred, and then decides not to confess.

b. Discuss the story from the point of view of Jerry and from the point of view of his friend Fred. What does Fred think caused his father's death? Does Jerry's conscience permit him to remain friends with Fred?

c. Talk about what Jerry could be thinking; how he could be feeling. What kinds of action might these thoughts lead him to? (Point out that the students' ending to the story must be based on their answer to this question.)

d. Review rules for punctuation of conversations.

Composing: Students write their endings to the story. Teacher circulates to check for mechanical errors.

Editing: Student pairs exchange compositions and check them for spelling, grammar, mechanics.

Revising: Students write neat final copies.

Evaluating: Student volunteers read their compositions to the class.

Modifications:

a. Have the low-level reader listen to "Bloodstain" on a tape while reading along.

b. The less capable student could write a shorter (1/2 page) composition, discarding the restricted point of view (Jerry's), and simply telling what he thinks will happen to Jerry or what Jerry will do. (Will Jerry change his mind? Why or why not? Is he discovered? If so, how? By whom?)

Comments:

Most students find the story engrossing and the assignment motivating. There is always the possibility, however, that some time an ED student will become extremely threatened and upset by the content. Watch for cues, such as unusual fidgitiness, hair-twisting, gnawing at fingers, which could indicate anxiety. If the student balks at doing the writing assignment, provide him with an alternative story-starter.

13. WRITING AN ESSAY

Type of Writing: Informative/Persuasive

Audience: County Police Wive's Association

Assignment:

Write a 200 - 1,000 word essay on the topic "Truancy and the Teenager." The paper should have 3 parts: an introductory paragraph consisting of a general statement of the problem; two body paragraphs, one enumerating causes and the second describing the effects of teenage truancy; and a concluding paragraph restating the problem and suggesting some solutions to it.

Prewriting:

a. Ask the class to share their personal observations regarding truancy. Do they see it as a problem? Why or why not?

b. The class discusses possible causes of truancy.

c. The class discusses possible effects of truancy on a wide variety of persons: the truant, members of the truant's family, teachers, administrators, peers, law enforcement officials, shopkeepers, homeowners, etc.

d. The class discusses possible solutions to the problem of teen truancy.

e. The class evaluates a model essay on a similar theme.

f. The students individually make notes on whatever details they consider pertinent to their unique point of view, and organize this information under the categories of personal observations/generalizations (statement of problem), causes, effects, and proposed solutions.

Composing: The students write their essays according to the prescribed format.

Evaluating:

a. Students exchange essays.

b. Students evaluate each other's essays by responding to the questions (provided on a dittoed handout):

1) Does the writer clearly identify and state the nature and extent of the problem?

2) Does the writer provide enough examples (effects) in the third paragraph for the reader to conclude that there is indeed a problem?

3) Does the writer communicate his or her own feelings about the issue?

4) Is the reader persuaded that the solutions offered in the final paragraph are workable? If not, what could the writer do to strengthen his/her suggestions?

5) Is the writer's language appropriate for the intended audience?

Revising: The student makes a final copy of the essay, incorporating the comments of the evaluator.

Comments:

a. Because the range in assignment length permits the student to complete the essay in as few as 200 words, no further modification of length is necessary.

b. Because this is an opinion paper, as opposed to a research report, the low-ability student is freed from the fear of making a "wrong" answer, and can be given the needed assurance that her opinions are as valid as those of any other student.

c. Because the class as a group has discussed many possible causes, effects, and solutions, the writer who "can't think of anything" is given the option of simply selecting the information that best conforms to his own opinion and can concentrate on the

task of organizing the information according to the model presented and clearly expressing it in complete sentences.

d. Because the student with blocks to learning has participated in the class discussions, she is much more motivated to attempt such an assignment than would be the case if the assignment were presented in the traditional manner.(i.e., "Today I want you to write an essay on the topic 'Truancy and the Teenager.' You may begin your papers now and finish them at home.") Moreover, this student will be motivated to attempt similar assignments in the future because the prewriting activities have been structured so as to provide maximum reinforcement by ensuring a successful first experience.

A High School Expository Writing Course

The nine week expository writing course outlined here is presented sequentially, not with the expectation that it will be used step by step, but rather as an example of how a total scope and sequence of assignments can be modified to meet the needs of the lower achieving, mainstreamed student.

1. OPINION PARAGRAPH: TOPIC SENTENCE-SUPPORTING DETAILS

Type of Writing: Persuasive/Informative

Audience: Teacher/Peer

Assignment:

Write a paragraph expressing an opinion which is supported by reasons or examples. The paragraph must have a topic sentence clearly stating the opinion, body sentences which are reasons or examples supporting the topic sentence and a concluding sentence which restates the topic sentence.

Prewriting:

a. The students view Part I of Communication Skills: Expository Writing, Guidance Associates, which gives criteria for and models of this assignment.

b. Generate a list of potential topic sentences.

Composing: The students write the paragraph.

Evaluating:

a. Does the paragraph begin with a clearly stated topic sentence?

b. Is each body paragraph a reason for or an example of the topic sentence?

c. Does the final sentence use synonyms to restate the topic sentence?

d. Is the paragraph free of sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and spelling errors?

e. Have transitions, such as in addition, more over, in summary, therefore, been used where needed, especially between body sentences? Do commas follow the transition words?

Modifications:

a. Have a dittoed model available.

b. Allow more prewriting time with peer or teacher assistance.

c. Help students generate a list of examples or reasons to support the topic sentence.

2. PROCESS PARAGRAPH

Type of Writing: Informative

Audience: Peers

Assignment:

Write a paragraph describing a process, either an informational process which describes a logical sequence of events or a directional process which gives directions for doing something, Sentence 1 names the process, sentence 2 begins the sequence, body sentences continue the sequence and the final sentence concludes the process.

Prewriting:

a. The students view Part II of Communication Skills: Expository Writing which includes criteria for and models of the paragraph.

b. Review transitions commonly used - then, next, second, followed by, etc.

Composing: The students write the paragraph.

Evaluating: Students exchange papers and follow an evaluative questionnaire to evaluate one another's paragraphs.

Modifications:

a. Have a written model available.

b. Explain the process orally to another student as a check for clarity.

c. List the steps sequentially in writing.

3. PERSUASIVE ARGUMENT

Type of Writing: Persuasive

Audience: School Board

Assignment:

a. Read chapter 1-4 of the text, The Lively Art of Writing by Lucille Vaughn Payne.

b. Discuss the material and study the models provided, paying particular attention to the overall format and construction of each of the 5 paragraphs.

c. Generate a list of pros and cons related to this issue.

d. As a class, examine a model paper written by a student and evaluate it for its strengths and weaknesses.

Composing: The students write one paragraph per day.

Evaluating:

Using questions related to the purpose and form of each paragraph, the students evaluate, from introduction to conclusion, one paragraph per day.

Modifications:

a. Ask the EEN teacher (or aide) to review the chapters with the student.

b. Have the less able student write a 3 paragraph opinion paper, the body paragraph of which will contain 3 points supporting the thesis statement.

c. Have the more capable student write a 3 paragraph paper, the body of which will begin with a dissenting opinion. The body of the paragraph will contain 3 supporting points to refute the dissenting opinion.

4. PERSUASIVE ARGUMENT

Type of Writing: Persuasive

Audience: To be determined by the student.

Assignment:

Write a 5 paragraph paper of persuasion. Identify the audience to whom the argument is directed. Base the arguments on library research.

Prewriting:

a. Read chapters 5-7 of The Lively Art of Writing.

b. Discuss the material and complete the study guide, paying particular attention to smooth transitions (word and idea hooks), "picture frame" paragraphs (vivid detail supporting the topic sentence) and body paragraph length (100 word minimum).

c. Generate a list of possible topics.

d. Generate a list of potential audiences.

e. Review library research and reference skills.

f. Visit library/IMC.

g. Examine model paper written by student and evaluate it for strengths and weaknesses.

h. State thesis and list points which support it.

i. Review mechanics of documentation.

j. Practice paraphrasing and restating ideas.

Composing: The students write one paragraph per day.

Evaluating:

From introduction to conclusion the students write and evaluate one paragraph per day with the help of an evaluative questionnaire such as the following:

Introduction:

1) Does the paragraph begin with a general statement and work to the specific?

2) Does the paragraph flow smoothly from sentence to sentence? Are transitions needed to improve the flow of the paragraph?

3) Is the thesis stated clearly in the last sentence?

Body Paragraphs:

1) If the paragraph begins with refutation, is an appropriate transition used to introduce it (i.e., it may be true that, to be sure, granted, etc.)?

2) If the paragraph begins with a refutation and goes on to a point in support of the thesis, is an appropriate transition used (i.e., but, however, on the other hand, etc.)?

3) If the paragraph begins with a point in support of the thesis, is an appropriate transition used (i.e., furthermore, the next step, this leads quite naturally into an additional point, etc.)?

4) Is the topic sentence clearly stated? (The topic sentence is the statement supporting the thesis.)

5) Is the topic sentence supported by convincing evidence? List the evidence from paragraph 4.

6) Are paragraph hooks used in addition to standard transitions? Write one here.

7) Is there a concluding sentence which rephrases the topic sentence? Write the topic and concluding sentence of Paragraph 2.

8) Have mechanical errors been corrected?

Conclusion:

1) Does sentence 1 restate the thesis?

2) Do the sentences following sentence 1 go from the specific to the general? Write the first and last sentence here.

3) Do the last sentences "echo" the introduction, that is, use phrasings from paragraph 1 or refer back to the same idea?

4) Is the reader left with "food for thought" as the paper concludes? (Beyond arguing that gun control laws are unconstitutional, does the writer, for example, leave the reader thinking about which constitutional right might next be challenged?)

Modifications:

a. Have the EEN teacher or (aide) review the chapters with the students.

b. Provide individual help in selecting the topic and an appropriate audience.

c. Have the less able student write a 3 paragraph paper, the middle of which will contain 3 supporting points drawn from the research.

d. Have the more capable student write a 3 paragraph paper, the middle of which will contain 3 supporting examples from the research which refute the opening statement of the paragraph as in the following example: "My brother says marijuana is safe because he has smoked for two years, but I feel it can be harmful because..."

5. SHORT STORY ANALYSIS

Type of Writing: Persuasive

Audience: Teacher/Peer

Assignment:

After reading a short story, write a 5 paragraph paper stating a premise or conclusion that can be supported by internal evidence.

Prewriting:

a. The student reads and analyzes one of several short stories suggested by the teacher.

b. Students who selected the same story discuss the story with one another.

c. Review rules for needed punctuation, etc.

d. Examine a model for form, content, and style.

e. Develop a thesis statement.

f. List 3 details from the story that support the thesis.

Composing: The students write one paragraph per day.

Evaluating:

Using questions relating to the purpose, form and mechanics of each paragraph, the students evaluate, from introduction to conclusion, one paragraph per day.

Modifications:

a. Students who have reading difficulties are referred to low-level, high-interest materials.

b. Provide the low readers with more structure and guidance during the discussion phase of this assignment. (Teacher sits with them as they discuss or provides handout of study questions to answer orally.)

c. Provide individual help in the selection of a thesis statement and supporting details.

d. The less able student can incorporate the supporting details into one body paragraph, thus cutting the length of the composition to 3 paragraphs.

6. WRITING A REVIEW

Type of Writing: Persuasive

Audience: Peers

Assignment:

After choosing a novel that has been read or a TV show/movie which has been viewed, write a 3-5 paragraph paper supporting an opinion or conclusion with interval evidence.

Prewriting:

a. Read and discuss several models, such as a review of the same movie in 3 sources, (Milwaukee Journal, Time magazine, the New York Times) noting that a review may be very opinionated, but to be convincing must use good examples.

b. Discuss differences in writing about the 3 genres (With the novel, examples may be found in reviewing, but with the TV show/movie, the student must rely on a vivid recollection or good notes.)

c. Read and discuss a student model and evaluate it for strengths and weaknesses.

d. Review rules for needed punctuation, etc.

e. Develop a thesis statement.

f. List details which support the thesis.

g. Choose the most appropriate format (one, two or three body paragraphs) contingent on the nature of the internal evidence.

Composing: The students write one section of the paper per day, (introduction, body and conclusion).

Evaluating:

With the help of an evaluative questionnaire, the students evaluate the introduction, the body and the conclusion of one another's papers.

Editing:

After papers are graded, students correct remaining errors before papers are duplicated and made available to peers in booklet form to assist them in making choices about novels, movies and TV shows.

Modifications:

a. Suggest a low-level, high-interest novel recently read as a topic for a book and a short (half hour to hour) TV show for that topic. The student should take notes while viewing either a TV show or a movie.

b. Provide opportunity for discussion of the topic. (Why was a chase scene exciting? Why did you like it when Burt Reynolds told Smokey off?)

c. Provide individual help in selection of a thesis statement and supporting detials.

7. PERSUASIVE ESSAY

Type of Writing: Persuasive

Audience: Teacher/Peer

Assignment: In the class period, write a 3-5 paragraph persuasive paper on the announced topic.

Prewriting:

a. Two days prior to the impromptu, introduce and discuss 5 topics which have been chosen on the basis of student relevance and topicality. (e.g.,"Waste is a part of the American way of life," "Energy conservation is being practiced in my family,"The Brewers have a good chance of winning the pennant,"etc.)

b. Review the form and function of introductory body and concluding paragraphs in a persuasive paper.

Composing:

Two days after discussing the topics the teacher will assign one of the topics for the impromptu. The student will have 1-3 body paragraphs, depending on the support he has for his thesis.

Evaluating:

Selected papers may be read to the class or viewed on the overhead with the teachers and students evaluating the papers on the basis of:

1) Does the introduction follow the form of general to specific?

2) Is the thesis clearly stated as the last sentence of the introduction? State thesis here.

3) Does each body paragraph have a topic sentence which supports the thesis statement?

4) Does each body paragraph contain convincing support-material? List the supporting material of paragraph 2.

5) Does the final paragraph restate the thesis in sentence 1 and provide a conclusive note for the paper?

6) Although more mechanical errors are understandable in an impromptu, are the errors so frequent or blatant they detract from content?

7) Are appropriate transitions used? List a transition used in paragraph 2.

Modifications:

a. Have the less able student submit an outline for 3 of the 5 topics consisting of thesis statement, supporting details and concluding statement.

b. Give the less able student the option of writing on any 3 of the 5 topics.

Comment:

While it may seem contradictory to discuss impromptu topics 2 days prior to writing, experience has shown that if students are not given a topic until the day of the writing, their product tends to be shallow, lacking in specificity and even off the topic. (Waste as a part of the American way of life might be misinterpreted, for example, as wasting time or not saving money.) Discussing the topics may take away some of the spontaneity but it insures a better product.

8A. ESSAY QUESTIONS (Optional)

Type of Writing: Persuasive

Audience: Teacher/Peer

Assignment:

Write 5 essay questions based on the 5 basic writing patterns. From a list of student questions distributed by the teacher, answer an essay question.

Prewriting:

a. Discuss the 5 basic writing patterns: cause-effect, main idea - detail, compare - contrast, chronology and enumeration.

b. Practice writing essay questions based on these 5 patterns and discuss strengths and weaknesses in small groups.

c. Practice rephrasing essay questions so that they become good introductions/lead-ins to the essay answer.

d. Discuss appropriate transitions for each of the 5 question types (i.e., cause-effect: as a result, because of this...; main idea - details: in the first place, most importantly, in addition; compare - contrast: similarly, by contrast, likewise, conversely; chronology: In the past, last; and enumeration: first, second, finally).

e. Examine and analyze a model, emphasizing that an essay answer, like other good persuasive writing, has a beginning, a middle and an end.

Composing: Write an essay answer to a student-written essay question, wording of the question to determine the form of the answer.

Evaluating: Using a ditto, overhead projector or oral reading, the students and teacher evaluate sample essay answers in light of the

criteria outlined in the prewriting steps.

Modifications: Provide the less able students with 2-3 paragraphs from a text written at their reading level. Students will use the content of these paragraphs as material for their questions.

8B. LETTER WRITING (Optional)

Type of Writing: Persuasive/Informative

Audience: To be determined by the student

Assignment: Write a persuasive or informative letter.

Prewriting:

a. Discuss and list on the board examples of letters which persuade or inform and identify the audience of each letter.

b. Examine and discuss models of letters - from the editorial page of the Milwaukee Journal, for example - identifying the purpose and audience of each letter.

c. Choose an audience and purpose for a letter you will write and send.

d. Examine and discuss student and/or textbook models.

Composing: Write the letter.

Evaluating:

In small groups or dyads, evaluate one another's letters.

1) Who is the audience? Is the tone and content appropriate to the audience?

2) Is the purpose of the letter clearly informative or persuasive?

3) Does the letter show a plan and development? (Is there a beginning, a middle and an end?)

4) Have the conventions of letter writing been observed? (Are heading, inside address, greeting, body, closing and signature properly placed and punctuated?)

5) Is the body correctly punctuated?

6) Are there spelling errors? (Write misspelled words here. Correct all spelling.)

Editing: Make revisions and mail letter. A follow-up letter may be necessary if no response is received.

Modifications:

a. Provide individual assistance to the less able student in selecting a subject, a purpose and an audience.

b. Have the student enumerate the points to be made in the letter.

Comment:

When dyads are used for evaluating student writing, it is important that the student being evaluated have the opportunity to ask questions of the evaluator. The evaluator will improve his skills as he becomes aware of the impact of his feedback on the writer. This is particularly important to the mainstreamed or low ability students who need to know if their evaluation is "on target."

8C. POETIC ANALYSIS

Type of Writing: Persuasive

Audience: Teacher

Assignment: Write a 3-5 paragraph explication of a poem.

Prewriting:

a. Review poetic devices, such as figures of speech, persona, imagery, tone, theme, etc.

b. As a class, read and explicate a poem.

c. Write a sample thesis statement for the poem being discussed.

d. On the board, list supporting details for the thesis statement and discuss possible organization of an explication, if one were written based on this list.

e. Examine and discuss a model.

f. Review needed punctuation skills, expecially quotation marks and the diagonal.

Composing:

From 3 teacher-selected poems, choose one and write a 3-5 paragraph explication, being sure to have a clearly stated thesis, a body which supports the thesis and a conclusion.

Evaluating:

The teacher will evaluate on the following criteria:

1) Is there a clearly stated thesis?

2) Do body paragraphs have clearly stated topic sentences which support the thesis with internal evidence?

3) Is there a concluding paragraph where the thesis is restated?

4) Is the title of the poem punctuated correctly?

5) Are there run-on sentences or fragments?

6) Are lines from the poem punctuated correctly - either arranged in stanza form as they appear in the poem or used with a diagonal (/) to indicate the end of a line?

Comment:

Initially, option C would seem least appropriate for the student with reading and writing difficulties,but even a task requiring high level skills can be adapted to the less able student.

Modifications:

The less able student may choose one of the following options:

a. Answer a series of questions about a poem rather than write an explication.

b. Retell a poem in the form of a prose narrative.

c. Write a description of the narrator of the poem, "Stopping by Woods," for example. Consider content, tone, the narrator's observations, language, activities, etc.

9. JOURNAL (Optional)

Type of Writing: Informative

Audience: Self

Assignment: Keep a Journal.

Prewriting:

a. Define "journal" as a place to do personal writing which will not be evaluated for content, although occasionally a sharing time will be set aside for those who wish to read anything from their journals.

b. Discuss possible uses of a journal, such as the opportunity for personal expression, as acceptable outlet for emotions, a means of discovering essay topics, an obvious chance to practice writing, etc.

c. Discuss well-known journals, like those kept by Sarah Kemble Knight, Admiral Byrd and Anne Frank, as well as less well-known journals like Bill Stokes' journal from his Mississippi River trip and Mac Busby's account of running the Boston Marathon. (Both appeared in the Milwaukee Journal this spring.)

Composing: Some class time will be set aside for journal writing. Otherwise, students should make entries on their own, 5 times a week.

Evaluating: Journals will be checked periodically to see that they are being kept up to date.

Modifications: This is a task that a student of any ability can handle.

10. COURSE RECOMMENDATIONS (Optional)

Type of Writing: Informative/Persuasive

Audience: Sophomores

Assignment:

Based on experiences with English 11 - 12, juniors and seniors write recommendations to sophomores to help them choose English electives.

Prewriting:

a. Discuss difficulties of choosing English 11-12 electives as a sophomore.

b. With the help of a list provided by the teacher, list titles of all courses taken as electives.

c. Assign a + or - to each course on the basis of its worth/ usefulness.

d. Select the "+" courses and compare the course description to actual experience in the course. Note discrepancies, if any.

e. List and explain all the reasons to recommend this course.

f. Review capitalization rules for course titles.

g. Practice brevity and conciseness by correcting wordy sentences and writing a precis.

h. Discuss the attributes of a helpful recommendation, the difference, for example, between "this is a good course because the teacher makes it interesting" and "this is a good course because the teacher is enthusiastic and plans a variety of activities and approaches, like role-playing, small group work, films and a field trip."

i. Discuss audience. If selected examples of the recommendations are reproduced and made available to sophomores, what kind of recommendation is likely to be read? Why?

Composing: The students name the courses they recommend and explain why in one paragraph.

Evaluating:

In small groups, students will choose the best examples based on the following:

a. Is language concise and specific?

-Write a sentence which might be stated more concisely or a sentence which could be more specific.

-Rewrite the sentence to make it more concise or more specific. Specify which you have done.

b. Does the recommendation have reader appeal? If you were a sophomore, would you read this if it were not required reading?

-Identify one reason for or example of reader appeal.

c. Are there errors in capitalization? List them.

d. Are there run-on sentences or sentence fragments?

Editing:

The best examples will be returned to students for final editing. Recommendations will then be arranged by elective with each elective getting its own heading, collected in booklet form and placed in the guidance suite for sophomore use.

Comment: Because of the detailed task analysis outlined in pre-writing, no modifications are necessary.

Writing is most important . . . as a contribution to the development of a person.

-Donald H. Graves

In many senses, anyone's world is his or her language. Through language we understand, interpret, enjoy, control, and in part create our worlds. . . . In awakening students to the possibilities of language, (we) can help students to expand and enlarge their worlds, to live more fully.

-NCTE Commission on Composition

Using Writing to Improve Coping Skills

RATIONALE

Because the student "in the mainstream" has to function both inside and outside the classroom, we felt our guide would be incomplete without some acknowledgement of the fact that certain kinds of problems which may arise in either setting can often be effectively dealt with through writing. This is because writing, far more than speaking, forces the sender to stand back and take a look at what he is saying. When a student is hurt, angry, or upset, writing is the means whereby she can distance herself sufficiently from her experience to begin to observe it objectively. Talking about our feelings often heightens them, so that we become even more aroused. In writing about our feelings, however, we are inclined to become more dispassionate, more analytical and reflective. When a student with emotional or behavior problems comes to us ready to explode with feeling, we do him the most good, initially, by letting him vent it verbally, while we actively listen. It is only after the student has "talked himself down" that we can expect any kind of coherence to emerge. At this stage, writing offers a distinct advantage over speaking/listening in that it leaves a permanent record which can be re-examined at a later time.

In the three case studies which follow, the common problem is poor social interaction and lack of appropriate relating skills.

Although the students described are categorized as emotionally disturbed, they could just as well have been any other other exceptionality, or no exceptionality at all. In other words, similar problems exist for all types of students, and it is hoped that by studying the problem-solving techniques employed here, the teacher will be able to apply them in other situations. These students happen to be middle-schoolers, but the use of writing to resolve conflicts is generalizable to students of any age. Note that writing can either be assigned by the teacher, chosen by the students, or spontaneous. The important thing is to capitalize on it, whenever and however it occurs.

THREE CASE STUDIES

1. Kurt

Kurt got into trouble on the playground during lunch recess. He threw a softball with all his force at a student who wasn't looking. The playground supervisor, whose brother had lost an eye through a similar mishap, overreacted out of fear and rage. He picked Kurt up, swore at him, shook him, and slammed him against the school wall.

Kurt came into my room, shaken and angry. First I let him vent, then I asked him to tape record the whole incident as he had experienced it. (Taping, like writing, promotes distance between the sender and his experience, and it too leaves a permanent impression which can later be re-examined.) My goal at this point was not to ascertain whether Kurt's action had been right or wrong, accidental or deliberate, but only to show him an acceptable way of discharging and dissipating his anger.

When he had finished taping, Kurt was rational enough, though still irate, to consider different courses of action. He ruled out the most passive solution, i.e.,letting the matter drop, because he believed his ill treatment had been disproportionate to his offense. After considering various other alternatives, he decided to write a letter to the school principal expressing his grievance.

When students write for themselves, it is not appropriate for the teacher to criticize mechanics, spelling, or language. Since Kurt's intended audience was the principal, however, his letter went through several drafts and revisions before it was considered acceptable. Kurt's final copy was a masterpiece of clarity, which presented the following points (in order):

a. The fact that Kurt was having a problem with Teacher X.

b. The cause of the problem (what Kurt did, what the teacher did).

c. How Kurt felt about what had happened (sorry for what he did, but undeserving of what he got).

d. How Kurt thought the principal could help solve the problem (fire the teacher or at least elicit his promise not to manhandle any more kids).

Outcome: By the time Kurt had finished his final copy, he wasn't angry anymore. Only now could he think about putting himself in the teacher's place, by trying to imagine what he'd feel like and how he'd react if he saw someone repeating an action similar to that which had cost his brother an eye. He decided not to deliver the letter.

2. Dave

Dave developed the notion that his reading teacher was always picking on him either for minor classroom infractions or for nothing at all. He said he felt he always got blamed for everything just because he was an ED student, and he wanted me to set the teacher straight (in his words, "tell her off").

I told Dave I wasn't going to do his talking for him, but if he would be willing to confront the teacher with his feelings, I would arrange an interview time and be present for moral support. Dave agreed to the meeting.

Whereas in Kurt's case talking (taping) was used as a preparation for writing, in Dave's case writing was used as preparation for verbal confronting.

The feedback I gave Dave at this time was that he needed to back up his claim ("You're always picking on me") with specific examples, and that he should restate his premise as an I-message rather than a You-message ("I-messages" own feelings; "You-messages" assign blame). Dave was then instructed to write the I-message he wanted to deliver to his teacher, following this format:

I-statement:	I think/feel like/have the impression that...
Premise:	You're always picking on me
Examples:	Last Tuesday you...etc.
Effect:	When that happens, it makes me feel...
Reaction:	Then, what I'd like to do is...
Conclusion:	But what I really need (from you/for you to do, etc.) is....

Dave's written message was evaluated for clarity and specificity

only; Dave participated in the evaluation by reading his message aloud to me and revising it until he felt sure that it accurately expressed what he wanted to say. After reading the message out loud a few more times, Dave rehearsed delivering it without the script until he felt comfortable doing so.

I arranged the meeting between Dave and his teacher for noon of the following day. Dave rehearsed his message with me again a short time prior to the appointment. The conference took place as scheduled. It went very smoothly. By using the prescribed format (which was derived from an Effectiveness Training model), Dave was able to communicate his feelings to the teacher in a non-hostile way without putting her on the defensive.

Outcomes: (1) Dave learned how to formulate an I-message. (2) He learned to use it an an effective way of communicating his feelings. (3) The teacher gained respect for Dave and there were no more conflicts between them. (4) Dave's classroom performance and behavior improved markedly. (5) Dave learned to take responsibility for himself rather than manipulate someone into solving his problems for him. (6) Dave learned that confrontation doesn't have to be a hostile encounter.

3. Danny and Johnny

Johnny kept bugging Danny, another ED student, on the playground during lunch recess. A fight ensued during which Johnny spit in Danny's ear.

Danny came into my class crying after lunch. He was so upset he couldn't work. He couldn't stop sobbing enough to speak. I gave him a piece of white construction paper and a box of crayons.

He rubbed furious reds and oranges into the paper, making angry slashes and grinding circles. Finally the slashes began to take the form of letters. DIE YOU BASTARD, G-D- F-ING BASTARD DIE. As he jabbed angrily at the paper, his sobs turned to gasps, then hiccups, then slowly subsided.

Through the hiccups he told me his sad tale. Then he cried a little more. While he dabbed at his eyes, I asked him what he wanted to do. Earlier in the year, he would have said "Nothing," in the desperate hope that if he didn't acknowledge the problem, it would go away. This day he astounded me by requesting a chance to confront Johnny in the principal's office, with both the principal and me present.

Johnny came into my room the next hour, took one look at Danny and burst into tears. I told him I thought he had something to say to Danny. "Oh yes, I do, I do!" he sobbed. "Would you be willing to say it in front of me and Mr. Y?" I asked. "Oh, yes, I will. I'll do anything." So off we went to the principal's office.

In the prinicpal's office I asked Johnny to begin by telling exactly what had happened on the playground at recess. Choking back sobs he complied, then burst out, "Oh, Danny, Danny, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean it. I'm sorry. I'm really sorry!" "But why," squeaked Danny, "Why did you spit on me?" And this same Johnny, who the previous year would have denied it to the very end, would have reacted to this confrontation by running away to hide, responded bravely: "I lost control of myself, Danny. I was on the ground, and everyone was on top of me. I got scared. I wanted to get out.

I just lost control and spit. I didn't mean to. Oh, Danny," - crying harder - "I didn't know it was you!"

Later in the day, alone with me in the ED room, Johnny told me he wanted to write an apology to Danny, and he did. We corrected his draft for spelling and punctuation, and he rewrote it neatly. The content was straight from his heart.

Outcome: Both boys underwent a painful growth process from which each emerged a little wiser and more mature. They remained friends till the end of the year.

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